

MEAPO

U.S. forces and foreign allies benefit from unique organization

By Julie K. Shoemaker

The Middle East/Africa Projects Office was activated as a subordinate organization of the South Atlantic Division, on Sept. 30, 1986, when the 10-year history of the Middle East Division came to a close.

According to the Fall 1986 issue of *Middle East/Africa News*, Lt. Gen. E. R. Heiberg III, then the Chief of Engineers, wrote a letter to the MED employees on the occasion of the division's deactivation and activation of MEAPO.

"The Corps of Engineers prides itself on its ability to effectively manage organizational change while adapting to new requirements. During the Middle East Division's 10-year history, it has created, merged, and abolished offices as workload demanded. Once devoted totally to the massive design and construction of Saudi Arabia, the largest overseas program in Corps history, you have broadened your horizons throughout the Middle East and into the farthest corners of Africa.

"You alone have made the Corps' name among the most respected in the international arena. You can be justifiably proud of your accomplishments, as I am proud of your contributions to the Corps, the United States, and our foreign allies," the letter said.

According to Brig. Gen. C. Ernest Edgar III, South Atlantic Division commander when MEAPO was activated, the mission of the new organization would be challenging and exciting. "I believe there is a future workload in the Middle East and Africa and perhaps elsewhere, whereby we can help build the infrastructure in third world nations. We will actively pursue these opportunities within our government and with foreign governments who can use the Corps' expertise and experience," he said.

MEAPO was established as a "district-level project office" equal to the five existing SAD districts. According to Edgar, "projects" focused on the type of work — building, designing or planning — better than the considered but more nebulous 'activities.' And 'Middle East/Africa' defined the area of predominant operations. Additionally, the stature of the district was maintained while avoiding the political confusion that a new district with no stateside military construction or civil works mission might cause.

The Saudi program, the mainstay and focal point of the organization's mission, began in 1976 and officially closed out in 1988 after \$14 billion in construction. The work of the newly designated project office was a turning point for the organization.

"Until 1986, we were focused on Saudi Arabia, with the only major exception being the Oman military

Commanders

Col. R. E. Schroder, June 1983 to June 1987

Col. D. Fred Butler, July 1987 to January 1990

Col. William A. Miller, January 1990 to January 1991

construction program begun in 1982," said Joan Kibler, public affairs officer. "As the Saudi Program began to wind down, other programs that called for engineering support emerged. The professionals of the Middle East Division assumed the responsibility for those programs.

"The new emphasis moved us from a single-customer, single-country, multi-billion-dollar program, to regional operations throughout the Middle East and Africa, handling vastly different types of work with different customers in different countries," Kibler said.



File photo

John Glover helps a Corps of Engineers employee with his protective mask during preparation for deployment to Operation Desert Shield.



File photo

Contractors begin prepping a site for construction at Thumrait, Oman.

Among the earliest programs were:

- Design and construction of radio relay stations for the Voice of America, with projects in Morocco, Liberia, Thailand, and Botswana.
- Several grass-roots projects in places like Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Mauritania, under the Africa Civic Action program. Under this program, host nations accomplished projects that benefited both the military and civilian populations with projects such as clinics, housing, and water facilities, and MEAPO provided technical and procurement assistance.
- The earliest design, procurement, and construction projects in Egypt, working with the U.S. Air Force Materiel Command, to provide certain facilities to accommodate the Egyptian air force's acquisition of F-16 aircraft.
- And design and construction of Sheikh Isa air base in Bahrain.

MEAPO was also responsible for working with Third U.S. Army to develop several LOGCAP [Logistics Civilian

Augmentation Program] contracts and awarded the first one – the Southwest Asia Petroleum Distribution System Operational Project, called SWAPDOP. The contract required that the contractor develop a plan and the capability for rapidly installing, operating, and maintaining pipeline, pumps and terminals at specific locations in Southwest Asia to provide bulk petroleum distribution during contingency operations.

"These initial contracts were the precursors to today's LOGCAP," said Roger Thomas, director of Engineering and Construction Management. "Our organization was on the cutting edge of helping the Army use civilian contractors on the battlefield to provide select engineering and

logistics services.

"In 1992, we would go on to award the Army's first worldwide LOGCAP contract, working closely with the Corps Headquarters and Department of Army staff in administering the contract," Thomas continued. "This contract was used to support six contingency operations during the five years we managed it."

As MEAPO's history began to draw to a close, Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm set the stage for the next chapter.

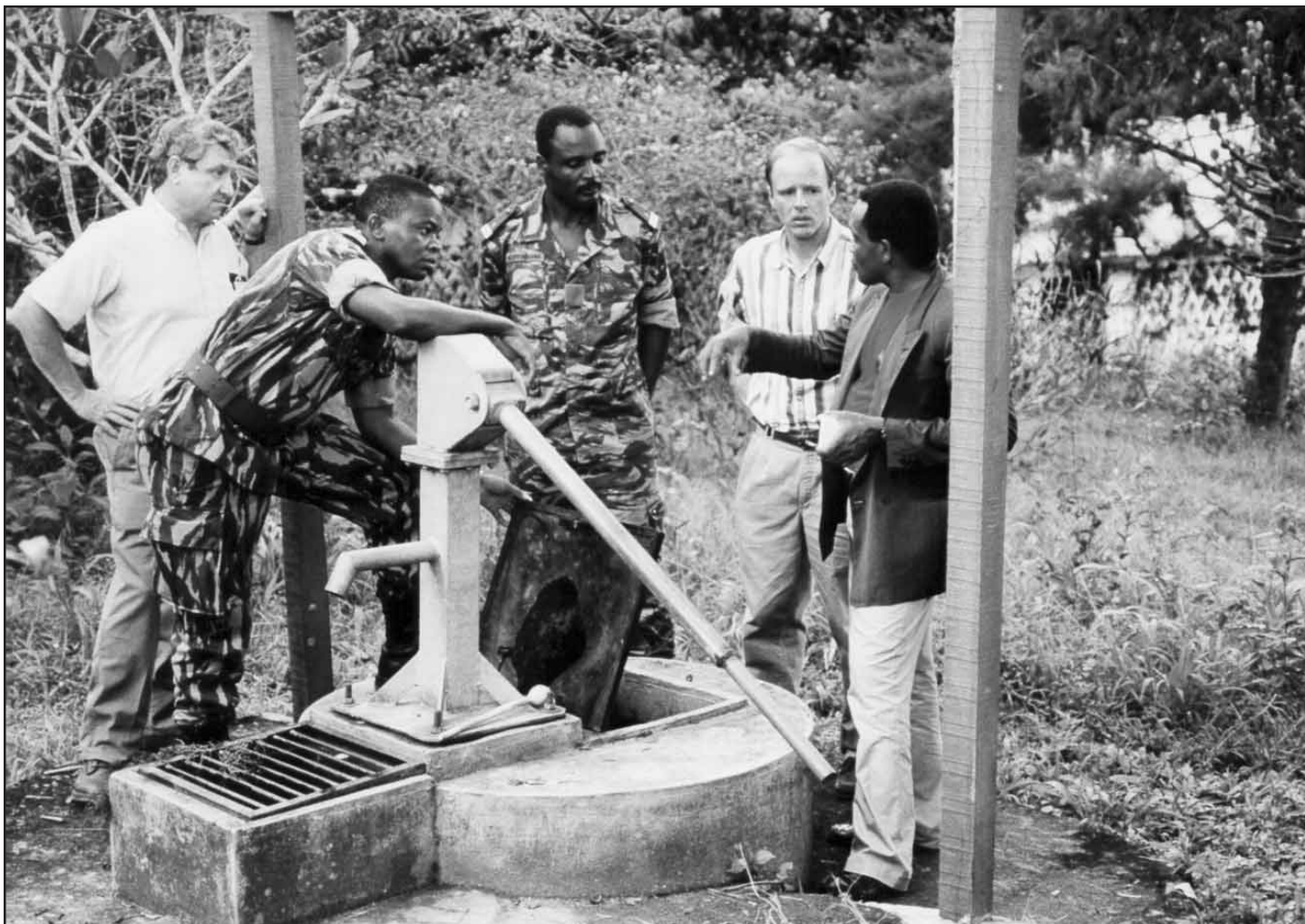
Corps of Engineers officials selected MEAPO to serve as the center for processing all Corps personnel deploying to the Middle East for the military operations in the 1990s given its long history of deploying people into that part of the world, even though MEAPO had never processed anyone for assignment and duty overseas during a military contingency.

The MEAPO staff developed and implemented procedures to prepare overseas replacements. They



File photo

A facility built for the Egyptian air force at the Cairo West Air Base.



File photo

Jim Madden (left), a civil engineering technician, and Steve Gay (second from right), an Army captain, discuss future well drilling and water pump projects with Cameroon army engineers, as part of the Africa Civic Action program started during MEAPO's existence.

handled all the final processing: issued forms and identification cards, equipment, clothing and chemical defense equipment. Orientation classes were also quickly scheduled. Each deploying civilian had to have a current shot record, a valid passport, a recent physical examination, a Geneva Convention card, and later, a panoramic dental x-ray. Each also had to be fitted and nuclear, biological, and chemical equipment and protective clothing.

MEAPO borrowed Fort [George G.] Meade's commandant for nuclear, biological, and chemical training to prepare the lead element for deployment. An officer from the Virginia National Guard trained the deployees, assisted by MEAPO employee John Grove who had served three years as the chemical noncommissioned officer for the same Guard unit. Grove then took over all the training for deployees.

The training provided by MEAPO during the early 1990s may have set the stage for the current USACE Deployment Center operations, a week-long training attended by all Corps civilians and many from other federal agencies, deploying to Iraq or Afghanistan, conducted at the Transatlantic Center headquarters.

The MEAPO organization was redesignated the Transatlantic Division in January 1991 with one

subordinate district – the Europe District, which had been downsized from its former status as a division; the Ordnance Program Division in Saudi Arabia; and several existing field offices throughout the region.



File photo

Engineers take a project tour at Sheikh Isa air base in Bahrain.